



Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-670-9717 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024 with funding from
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<https://archive.org/details/bib292882>

THE RABBI MADE ME EAT ON YOM KIPPUR, 1948

by
Sol Wieder

My first Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) in America was almost here and I yearned to attend a synagogue service that would remind me of home - my lost home...

Going to a modern Synagogue or Temple as they call it here, did not appeal to me at all. It would not give me the appropriate spiritual environment that I was searching for... I was looking for a synagogue that would shake me up, would put fear in my soul and at the same time would warm my heart and bring back beautiful memories and of course tears -- lots of tears. A good cry on my first Yom Kippur in America would do me good, I felt. I simply must find an old fashioned "shul" where very religious or Chasidic Jews pray. Such a "shul" will have the atmosphere that will induce me to cry my heart out for the tragedy and the loss I sustained in the Holocaust. I wanted to fast so badly and say "Yizkor" on Yom Kippur for my devoted father, loving mother, beautiful sister and my two small brothers. I loved them all so much and simply cannot get them out of my mind. I also wanted to pray for all other relatives and friends that perished. I learned that such "shuls" (some call them "shtibel") are in abundance on the Lower East Side.

I made arrangements to pray on the Lower East Side. The shul was very close to the Forward Building on East Broadway. I rented a 75 cent hotel room on the Bowery where I will stay the night after "Kol Nidre" services.

Yom Kippur eve was almost here. Several hours before sundown, I left my Sunnyside, Long Island furnished room, traveled by by the BMT subway to the Lower East Side and checked into an old and neglected Hotel. I simply could not afford a better Hotel and convinced myself that God will be good to me and protect me from all evil. One good deed deserves another, I said... After all I came to do a "mitzvah" by staying in a dilapidated hotel and praying in a poor shul with God fearing people on the holiest of holidays.

I arrived in the vicinity of the "shul" with a five dollar bill. Since it would be a sin to carry money in my pocket on Yom Kippur, I concealed the five dollar bill under the metal leg of a bench in a small park, right across the "Forward" building. I entered the shul, was greeted by the

Rabbi's grandson and was handed a High Holiday prayer book, called the "Mahzur." I was then directed to a seat right near the entrance.

Many things entered my mind while sitting and staring at the huge lit candles. I was thinking about my lost family, my old home, my school friends, my neighbors, the synagogue, the old Rabbi, the Cantor and the Choir, yes, the choir where I was the "tenor" during my childhood.

Suddenly, an old white bearded Rabbi entered the "shul," wearing a very long "talith and white kittel" (prayer shawl and white gown). The "Oren Kodesh" (Holy Ark) was opened, the members of the congregation came to their feet and the Rabbi started the prayers to be followed immediately with "Kol Nidre" (*) which made me cry. After services, I checked into the hotel, locked the door and went to sleep, totally ignoring the loud noises coming from the corridor.

I left the hotel Yom Kippur morning bright and early on my way to "shul" for a full day of fasting, reflecting and praying. After all it was Yom Kippur, my first Yom Kipur in America... Prior to the Yizkor ceremony, the Rabbi lectured the members of the congregation and asked each and everyone to pray with passion and sincerity and above all, repent for all the sins committed during the year. He warned that at the end of the "Day of Atonement" all verdicts will be sealed.

Do you know who shall live and who shall die, the Rabbi asked. Of course you don't know. You can rest assure the ALMIGHTY GOD knows. JEWS, he continued, there is still time... REPENT!!

I warn you, REPENT!!! Otherwise, you know what can happen, God forbid... God may send a modern "HAMMAN" like he did in Europe, a HITLER." Yes, this is what happens when our people go away from the "derech hajosher." ("righteous way.") Jews, I beg you - repent!!! Time is of the essence.. Time is running out...

Did I hear the Rabbi correctly? Am I crazy or has the Rabbi lost his mind? I was getting very emotional, started sweating and became very restless and felt like screaming... Rabbi, Rabbi, please... What are you saying? Don't you know Rabbi, that most of the victims perished on "KIDDUSH HA-SHEM"(**) were religious and God fearing Jews. I felt like screaming "GEWALT!" (HELP!) What are you saying and what are you preaching against the six million martyrs.

Instead, like a coward, I left the shul in disgust - shaking my head in disbelief. I returned to the park bench, retrieved the five dollar bill and

immediately went to look for a place to eat, to break the fast... I simply had to get even with the Rabbi... Unfortunately, in 1948, most, if not all the restaurants in the "shul" vicinity were Kosher and closed on Yom Kippur. I kept walking further in search of an eating establishment to break the fast. Finally, I stumbled into a small Polish Restaurant where I ordered and ate a "kielbasa" sandwich in order to get even with the Rabbi.

I was convinced that the Rabbi made me eat on Yom Kippur and no one could convince me otherwise....

(*) KOL NIDRE: A prayer that opens the synagogue service on Yom Kipur evening. It is a prayer to God asking forgiveness for vows that have been made to HIM and not kept.

(**) KIDDUSH HA-SHEM: "Sanctification of God's name," and signifying the highest virtuous conduct and by readiness for martyrdom.

